An
Inaugural Dissertation
on
Dysentery
For
The Degree
of
Doctor of Medicine
In the
University of Pennsylvania
By
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of
North Carolina.

Dysentery

Dysentery is derived from the Greek words δυς bad, εντερον the intestine, and ρεω to flow, signifying bad discharges from the intestine.

It is a disease of the Country, prevailing mostly on high situations, and scarcely ever occurs epidemically, in large Cities.

It is an inflammation of the mucous coat of the intestinal canal, attended by fever, frequent mucous or bloody discharges, and occasionaly both: at the same time, there are also tenesmus and tormina, followed not unfrequently by prolapsus ani.

Dysentery sometimes comes on with cold shivrings, frequent flushings of the face, and a quick pulse; at other times, the local affection is first perceived, such as unusual flatulence in the bowels, with frequent inclination to go to stool, attended

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with constipation. There is also loss of appetite; nausea; vomiting; a hot skin, and frequent pulse, the tongue much furred, at first white, afterwards of a brown colour, rough and dry along the middle, with a red and moist border; in protracted cases it has a clean and florid appearance on the edges, or it has a smooth, clean, and a deep red aspect over its whole surface, becoming sometimes aphthous; at the same time there is tenderness of the abdomen, with bloody, mucous discharges, sometimes entirely mucus, at others altogether blood; the smell of the stools, most frequently is disagreeable: sometimes masses of indurated faces pass, these masses are usually of a round, compact form, known by the name of scybala: the passage of which generally gives momentary relief.

Causes. Dysentery often appears to be the production of the joint influence of atmospheric vicissitudes, and marsh effluvia. Suppressed perspiration is almost always among the first-

morbid phenomena of this disease; likewise derangements of the Liver and Skin are always present. (Says Dr. Johnson). I am induced to believe this to be the fact, from having found it to be the case in two attacks of my own person, besides witnessing it in a number of others.

I was attacked on the eighth day of June last with several of the above named symptoms, brought on, as I believed from having ate a quantity of strawberries a few hours before; one of the strongest evidences I have in support of this opinion, is that for five or six days after my attack, I discovered the seeds to be passing in a solid and undigested condition.

In this case there was previous derangement of the Stomach, which may be said to have been the predisposing cause, the seeds spoken of acting probably as the exciting cause.

There are other causes of this disease, such

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as unripe fruit, indigestible and unwholesome food. Cold is also a frequent cause of Dysentery: As there is a morbid disposition in most persons during the summer months, it is reasonable to suppose if during the state of perspiration, the patient be suddenly exposed to cold, there will be checked perspiration, and vascular action forced from the surface.

The saline substances of the blood, which had been passing from the skin, are now all retained, preventing an equilibrium of circulation. The debilitated viscera, instead of receiving their usual proportion of the circulating mass, have now an undue share. Their debilitated state, render them unable to dispose of this sudden accumulation. Congestion or inflammation is then, undoubtedly the consequence.

Diagnosis. The symptoms in this disease are so strongly marked, that we can scarcely confound it with any other. The disease to which it has the strongest resemblance, is acute Diarrhœa.

Diarrhœa is defined by Dr. Chapman to be an inflammation of the mucous coat of the intestine alone, while in Dysentery it is extended to the muscular, and some times much further. It is distinguished from Diarrhœa, by the tenesmus, bloody stools, and general fever. — fecal bed discharges?

Prognosis. The strength not much impaired, the stools becoming more natural, less frequent and more abundant, a diminution of pain, and also of tenesmus, a moderate degree of pyrexia, with a gentle and universal Diaphoresis, are all to be looked upon as favourable symptoms: but on the other hand, violent pyrexia, a great degree of tenesmus, severe griping pains, frequent inclination to go to stool, and but little voided, the discharges fetid and of a greasy appearance, (compared by Dr. Chapman to the washings of fresh meat.) much depression of strength,

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a weak irregular pulse, cold clammy sweats, the mouth ulcerated, hicup and difficult breathing, are to be regarded as very unfavourable symptoms. Notwithstanding which, the Physician should not despair of a cure being effected; but continue his exertions, with unremitting zeal so long as the patient may continue to breathe.

"That man is but little used to the exercise of the social virtues, who is ignorant of the influence a kind and feeling conduct has upon his suffering patient — to him, it almost atones for the want of skill or experience; and to deprive him of it, is withholding a right for which nothing can compensate."

Post mortem examinations often reveal to us marks of inflammation throughout the whole course of the intestinal canal, particularly the colon and rectum. In protracted cases the colon exhibits the great ravages of this disease, by a deep livid hue, and sometimes even an erosion of the coats, sufficient

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to suffer the faces to escape into the abdominal cavity; A case of this kind ocurred at the Almshouse during the last summer under my observation. (The examination having been made by Dr Jackson, the attending physician.) Also the mesenteric glands were enlarged and filled with pus.

The liver likewise suffers structural derangement, being commonly enlarged and in a state of great sanguineous congestion, at other times preternaturally small and much hardened; besides which, marks of peritonaal inflammation are frequently discovered.

Pathology. From the symptoms presented in the commencement of Dysentery, we are induced to believe that the stomach is the first organ affected; shortly after which, there are indications of a morbid de= rangment of the lower intestines; But were we to judge only from preparations, taken from persons who have died under this disease, we would unques= tionably say, its primary seat is in the colon; for

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it is here we find the mark of its most extensive ravages. There is at this time a preparation in Dr Thorn's possession, which illustrates incontestably the latter position. It is said by Dr Johnson, the primary seat of the disease in question, is the liver; How far this assertion is correct, I am not at present prepared to say, but am willing to admit, that a derangment of this viscus may sometimes give rise to it.

Treatment. In Dysentery our first object should be, to reduce inflammation, the second will be to remove irritation and spasm, the third to open the bowels, and to restore perspiration. It is the practice with some, to commence the cure by giving an Emetic; But, highly as I prize this class of medicines, I do not think they will answer at all times. In miasmatic countries, where there are evident symptoms of an accumulation of bile, we might venture to give an emetic, but, still even here, I would first use the lancet; for the following reasons;

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The early drawing of blood, has a tendency not only to arrest inflammation, but also to arouse the susceptibility of the patient to the full action of other remedies. To aid blood letting, I know of no auxiliary more serviceable, than mild cathartics. Of this class of medicines, I prefer calomel to all others; especially where there are symptoms manifesting a total absence of bile. To derive the full effects of this medicine, it should be given in small but repeated doses. It is recommended by Dr. Chapman in combination, by giving one grain of calomel, half a grain of opium, with two or three grains of ipecacuanha; here the calomel is known to act on the secretions of the liver, the ipecacuanha on the functions of the skin, and the opium to allay the inordinate irritability in the intestinal canal. Fomentations applied to the abdomen, aided by mild injections, are found to assist the above mentioned remedies, in the reduction of inflammation. The warm bath may be

used with decided advantage, it has a strong tendency to equalise the circulation of the blood.

The second indication is to remove irritation and spasm. The medicine best calculated for this, is opium, though the efficacy of this medicine, has been denied by physicians of high standing; of whom was Dr. Cullen.

The third indication is to open the bowels and to restore perspiration. Here a combination of calomel and ipecacuanha may be given with advantage. I have also found the Oleum Ricini to answer a very good purpose. Cathartics are rejected by some, on account of the rapid debility of persons labouring under this disease, but it is not the alvine discharges, however, that produce this debility, but the irritated condition of the intestines; and purging by medicines has a tendency to abate or entirely remove the irritation and consequent debility. We are sensible however that

there are cases, in which we can not employ evacuants; such cases are to be found in old and debilitated persons. They are generally very unmanageable, and should be treated with opium, wine, and other stimulating medicines. The flannel bandage or roller, has ben highly recommended; blisters are also highly spoken of by Dr. Chapman, applied either to the abdomen or extremities, though he thinks they act more effectually, when applied to the abdomen.

There are yet some local affections, that demand our attention, I allude to tormina and tenesmus. They happen at all stages of the disease; when connected with foul accumulations in the intestines, the following formula is found to be beneficial —— ℞. Ol. Ricini, — " — " ℥.1.

Gum. Arabic, — " — ℥.1.

Sacchari Alb. — " — ℥.1.

Tinct. Opii, — " " gtt. XL.

Aq. menth. vel cinnamomi, ℥.11.

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A table spoonful of this, may be given every two or three hours. a simple injection of laudanum has often relieved both symptoms, or what answers equally well is a pill of opium, introduced an inch or more up the rectum, and there suffered to remain. An injection of melted butter, perfectly fresh, is also an excellent remedy. In such cases I have known the application of leeches to the rectum to answer a very good purpose. We should not neglect the application of fomentations to the stomach and bowels, they promote diaphoresis, besides which, they relieve spasm.

When copious perspiration is demanded, it is then requisite that we should give a combination of ipecacuanha and opium (Dovers Powders). With regard to Antimonials in this disease, I am not disposed to say much in their favour, though they are said sometimes to be used with success.

If from the above treatment our patient is rendered convalescent. It will then become necessary to

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guard him a gainst imprudence, in respect to food and exposure to cold.

His diet should be light and digestible; such as rice, gruel, barley-water, arrow root, sago, panada, tapioca, a little chicken water may be given, but meats of every discription, are to be cautiously avoided. He should be directed to wear flannel next to his skin, and his chamber should be kept well ventilated, he should not expose himself to the night air, or even to cool draughts of air.